

● CHRISTIAN RESOURCE ●

GOOD WORDS FOR GODLY LIVING



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INTRODUCTION

This book is a compilation of articles written for FaithFilledFamily.com (magazine) by the author. Each chapter is a stand-alone article on a specific topic – which is good because you won't be bored. Testimonies – anecdotes – and stories abound, along with some pretty good stuff on what the Bible says about the topic. The last chapter is a comprehensive look at the blessing of New Testament holiness and how you can receive it.

VISIONS OF THE NIGHT

According to the book of Job God speaks to everybody through dreams. "For God speaks again and again in dreams, in visions of the night when deep sleep falls on men as they lie on their beds. He opens their ears in times like that and gives them wisdom and instruction". (Job 33:17) The apostle Peter spoke of dreams as one of the signs of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days - when he explained the meaning of the events on the day of Pentecost to the people attracted by the sound of the Holy Spirits coming. (Acts 2) He quotes the prophecy of last day events by the Prophet Joel. (Joel 2:28-32) We can presume Peter was speaking of God pouring His Spirit only upon Christians. In fact, in the first part of the quote God promises to pour His Spirit upon all mankind. (Acts 2:17) A result of that outpouring is that old men shall dream dreams. (Acts 2:17)

The Bible records many occasions when God spoke to the Godly and the ungodly in dreams. God given dreams played a leading role in many of the momentous events in the Bible. In a dream God appeared to Jacob and gave him a promise about the nation of Israel and the blessing of the Gospel. (Gen 28) Joseph saw his destiny in a dream. He became a ruler in Egypt under Pharaoh because of his ability to interpret dreams. (Gen 37,40,41) His dream interpreting saved an entire nation from ruin by drought. God warned King Abimelech in a dream not to touch Sarah, Abrahams wife on pain of death. (Gen 20) Gideon gained confidence for victory over the Midianites and their allies when he heard enemy soldiers discussing a dream. (Judges 6)

By a dream God warned King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to humble himself or face divine discipline. Daniel became a witness of the God of truth and holiness when raised to prominence in Babylon by his ability to interpret dreams and visions. The first of Daniel's visions of the progress of world events and the end times was revelation in a dream. Daniel called it a dream, a vision of the night. (Dan 7:1) The Prophet Zechariah describes one of his messages from God as a vision at night. (Zech 1:7)

The Lord spoke with Joseph the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus three times through dreams. He received an explanation of the conception of Jesus and confirmation he should marry Mary in a dream. He was able to outmanoeuvre the devils' effort to destroy Jesus by fleeing with his family to Egypt, to escape Herod after a warning dream. By a dream the Lord alerted Joseph to the death of Herod and told him to return to Israel. After seeing the Christ child and counselled in a dream, the three wise men did not report back to Herod. God cautioned the wife of Pontius Pilate of the innocence of Jesus in a dream. Guided by a night vision Paul and his companions began to preach the gospel in Macedonia. (Acts 16:9)

The Lord used a dream to help me when I first became a Christian. I was having disturbing dreams every night – a pack of wild dogs would be after me among other things. It reached the stage where lying down to sleep was a stressful event. I obtained some relief when I came up with the idea of putting the Bible under my pillow each night. Years later I discovered Oral Roberts often slept with the Bible under his pillow. It wasn't the complete answer and I was still struggling. Finally, I dreamed one night I was standing in a circle of people in the garden bar of a hotel. I had not long been set free from a life of

frequenting hotels and excessive alcohol consumption. In the dream I glanced across at the people opposite me and there was Jesus standing with the group, dressed in white. After that night I had no problem with those disturbances again.

I have learned to take notice if I dream of a person dressed in white or an object that is white and is distinct from the other colours of the dream. Most of the time when God wants to get something across to me in a dream He follows that formula. Usually I can remember the dream when I wake, and I know it's meaning. For example, I dreamed I owned a white taxi. I had the cab at a race track. It was the only car at the track and myself and only one or two other people were present. I knew that I could race my cab on the track alone if I wanted to. The dream then changed, and I was in my white taxi at peak hour on a congested four lane highway. Traffic was moving slowly; the weather was hot, and the air polluted with fumes and smoke from truck and car exhausts. When I awoke I knew the meaning of the dream. The white taxi was my Christian life. In the first part of the dream I was keeping my Christian life to myself – it was not influencing non-Christian people at all. On the four-lane highway my life was out amongst the unsaved world where its light shone in a dark place. (Philip 2:15) A lot of discomfort was associated with life on the highway, but I knew God was pleased with that part of the dream.

At another time I saw a white Rolls Royce parked in a small showroom. The showroom walls were about twelve inches from the car on all sides. Again, I knew the meaning of the dream upon waking. The Rolls Royce was the Christian life – the best life a person can have. Standing immobile within four walls is not the cars true purpose. Travelling, out on the road where all can see its quality is its proper use. I know of many Christians

whose God given dream experience is different than mine.

Doug Addison of DougAddison.com offers an online dream interpretation course for Christians. The aim is to help Christians understand their own dreams and to be ready to interpret dreams of non-Christian people as a witness to the Gospel. That may be a new idea for you, but it is one with plenty of Bible backing – for example Joseph and Daniel. Doug teaches on video and gives a printable dream symbol dictionary. I have not had the chance to interpret a non-Christians dream since taking the course. I use the dictionary to guide me in understanding any of my dreams that seem significant. If an opportunity arises to speak to a person about a dream and we have not had training, we can follow Daniels example and simply ask God for the interpretation. Daniel went and prayed then returned with the interpretation.

The late John Paul Jacksons videos on YouTube are another useful source of teaching about dreams. His organisation Streams Ministries, is still in operation and I believe many of his dreams teaching products are still available. If dream interpretation seems a bit new age to you it's handy to remember the ability to dream came with the package when God created Adam from the dust. The Bible says Daniel had an excellent spirit which included the ability to interpret dreams. (Dan 5:12) We saw previously the meaning of dreams God gave to ungodly persons stayed hidden until a Godly person interpreted them. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all mankind and the old men dreaming dreams mentioned in Acts 2, tells us God is giving dreams to unsaved people who need us to explain the meaning. Doug Addison believes many unsaved people know they have had important dreams and are searching for the explanation. Doug does street work where he

asks people if they have a dream they want interpreted. Acts 2 confirms dreams are high on the list of Gods activities in the last days. The Amplified Bible says, "And your old men shall dream (divinely suggested) dreams".

How about bad dreams? Should we seek interpretation of bad dreams? I received a lesson on that some years ago. I dreamed a bear was after me in a church hall. Though I was hiding I knew the bear would eventually find me. It was a mildly disturbing dream. The next morning I decided – bear after me in a church hall – this has an important meaning for me. I made an appointment with my Pastor in the hope the two of us might get to the meaning of this dream. I was ready for an in-depth time with my Pastor. I was in his office five minutes. He said, "It's a negative dream Ross – God doesn't speak through negative dreams – forget it". I was embarrassed, but it helped to set up a principle I still stick too. Put very little importance on negative dreams. I know Prophet Doug Addison gives people a positive spin on negative dreams. If you don't have access to Doug or somebody like him then ninety nine percent of the time I believe, we should take my Pastors advice. Forget it.

My overall experience with dreams is that I do not have a lot of the God given dreams I have described above. I can often trace the foundation of my dreams to events that occurred the day before or to subjects I have been studying or thinking about. Occasionally I will have a dream (with no white content) that gets my attention and I will dig out Doug Addison's dream dictionary and look up the symbols. The results can be interesting - for example I dreamed one night I was standing in my front yard talking to a group of people. I can't recall the conversation, but I do remember during our talk I was thinking repeatedly, "They don't know what I have around the back of

the house". Even though that was my thinking in the dream, I did not know what was at the back either. After everybody had left I turned expectantly because I knew whatever was at the back was now coming around to the front. As I looked a huge tiger appeared and walked up to me. It frightened me at first, but I quickly realised it meant me no harm and that it was in fact my tiger. It seemed to be a significant dream and a search through Doug's dream dictionary revealed a tiger can mean power. Ephesians 1:18-20 always comes to mind when I think of that dream; "...That you may know...what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe...the same power that raised Jesus from the dead". We are often not aware of God's power in our lives (symbolised by the rear of the house and the house meaning my daily living) nor do we often feel it, but the word tells us it is there and always active on our behalf. Perhaps the dream was to remind me of that truth. I think it is important for us to be available to God about dreams - to ask how involved He wants us to be in dream interpretation, and if He wants us to do a course or some study on the subject.

GOD IS EVERYWHERE MAN

"We swim in an infinite ocean of love. To become increasingly conscious of our oneness with love, is the mark of exercising intelligent self-interest. To this end, we do not labour and strain in our search for love. It is above, beneath, and about us. It is seeking us". Starr Daily wrote that description of the omnipresence of God, who is love. He had been a gangster who worked for Al Capone. Jesus came to him while in prison and in solitary confinement and turned him into a man of love. I have marked that passage in Daily's book, 'Love can Open Prison Doors', and I re-read it occasionally. When I do, it usually takes two days for the blessing from the passage to wear off. I walk around all day thinking, "no matter where I am or what I am doing, I am immersed in the ocean of the love of God". "He loves me when I am at home, He loves me when I am at work, He loves me when I am racing along the highway in my car and He loves me when I am overseas on vacation".

I had lectures in Bible College, where the subject of the omnipresence of God was touched on. We treated it as an academic theological fact, and I have come to realise we missed the wonder and awe of that truth. One lecture on that subject did make an impression on me. The founder of the College, an apostolic leader, sometimes had informal discussions with us. On this occasion, he shared one of the ways he coped with his many responsibilities. He would go into his lounge room and invite the Lord to sit in one of the chairs. He would take another chair and begin a conversation with God about the pressing

needs of the various ministries. One of the students asked him, "how do you know God sits in the chair"? "Well, God is everywhere, isn't He"? he replied. I think all of us went home and tried it with the Lord, in the next day or two.

God's omnipresence is much more than a theological fact. Have you ever spent some time thinking about the truth, that God is present everywhere, in the fulness of who He is? The Bible says He is Love. It also says He is Light, Power and a Consuming Fire. Paul spoke on the omnipresence of God when trying to instill faith in the Men of Athens, recorded in Acts. "God made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they should grope for Him and find Him, though he is not far from each one of us; for in him we live and move and have our being. As also some of your own poets have said, 'for we are also His offspring'". (Acts 17:26-28)

You hear the word multi-tasking a lot these days. God is the master multi-tasker. For example, on a Sunday. Wherever it is Sunday around the world, God is present at the millions of Church meetings, anointing the preachers, healing the sick, casting out demons, working miracles, saving souls, being present in the worship and meeting the needs of individual Christians. I don't know how many Christians there are in the world, perhaps it's around a billion. I often think, when God is talking to me, encouraging me, answering my prayers, responding to my faith, and keeping a close eye on me; He is doing the same for millions of other Christians around the world, at the same time. How does He do that? Our human minds can't really process that. It makes God an awesome being, doesn't it?

David admitted that God's omnipresence was too much for him to take in. "Your knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high above me, I cannot reach it. Where could I go from your Spirit? Or where could I flee from your presence? If I ascend in to heaven, you are there; If I make my bed in Sheol behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me". (Psalm 139:6-10)

Jonah took the wings of the morning and tried to flee to the uttermost parts of the sea. "But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish (the most remote of the Phoenician trading places then known) from being in the presence of the Lord and went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So, he paid the appointed fare and went down with them into the ship, to go with them to Tarshish from being in the presence of the Lord". (Jonah 1:3) God had instructed Jonah to travel to Nineveh and preach against its' evil practises. Tarshish and Nineveh were at opposite ends of the ancient world. Jonah's plan may have been to get as far away from Nineveh as possible, in the hope that God would give the job to another because of Jonah's distant location. People in those times, tended to think of countries and areas as being under the authority of various god's. Jonah may also have had some hope that getting away from the territory of the God of Israel would take God's attention off him. (From idolphin.org)

Fortunately for Jonah, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good' (Prov 15:3) It was fortunate for Jonah, because God's omnipresence and grace made sure he obeyed and fulfilled his call, which is far better than living in disobedience. Jeremiah wrote, "Can any hide himself in secret places so that I will not see him? Says the

Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? Says the Lord". (Jer 23:24)

When Jacob left his Father and Mother to go his own way in the world, God saw that his faith and understanding needed a boost. He lay down to sleep at a certain place, and in a dream God gave him the promise of Divine protection, and presence, wherever he went. Genesis records that he had learned an important lesson. "And Jacob awoke from his sleep, and he said, surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it". (Gen 28:16)

Jacob did not have the benefit of the book of revelation and promises that we have. The Bible has a lot to say about God's omnipresence, and we can apply our faith to that information. Starr Daily's description of the ocean of God's love, came in part from Christ's visiting him while in solitary confinement. At that time, he saw the word love suspended in the air in large letters. He was a man of faith who knew his Bible said God is love, and God is omnipresent. I think he also applied his imagination to the truth of God's word to come up with that description. We can enrich our Christian experience by doing the same thing. If the first thing you did each morning upon waking was to remind yourself, 'today is another day of living in the ocean of God's love'. Would that bring changes to your life? You can't see it and you may not feel it, nevertheless it is still a spiritual truth straight from God's word.

C S Lewis described God's omnipresence this way, "We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito". (Letters to Malcolm) My home has been crowded with God all day today, and I expect the Supermarket and the Coffee Shop to be crowded with Him tomorrow.

DON'T TRY IT IN YOUR OWN STRENGTH

"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I laboured even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that is with me". (1Cor 15:9,10) His deliverance from an ungodly life, his work and his identity, Paul explains, are the result of God's grace. God's undeserved favour (grace) saved him.

His ability to serve God is the grace of God that is within him. His selfhood - his personality, is a product of the grace of God. "By the grace of God, I am what I am".

Paul's life presented to us in the New Testament, is an example, a template if you like of the Christian life that is pleasing to God. We don't know if it took some time for Paul to understand the grace life or whether he had revelation from the Lord about it. We do have examples of prominent Christians nearer to our time who had to learn the lesson of the exchanged life lived by grace. Saved as a child, an Englishman, Major Ian Thomas, in 1933 at age 19 - "became a windmill of activity, his life packed tight with feverish activity: preaching, talking, counselling with passionate desire to win souls for Christ. But he found the more he did, the more energy he expended - the less happened".

He states: "I became deeply depressed, because I loved the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart; I wanted to be made a blessing to my fellow men. But I discovered that forever

doubling and redoubling my efforts to win souls, rushing here and dashing there, taking part in this campaign, taking part in that campaign, preaching in the morning, preaching in the evening, talking to the Bible class, witnessing to this one, counselling with another, did nothing, nothing, nothing to change the utter barrenness, the emptiness, the uselessness of my activity. I tried to make up with noise what I lacked in effectiveness and power”.

Worn out after seven years he was ready to give up. Then the Lord Jesus spoke to him “You have been busy trying to do for Me all that only I can do through you. Now supposing I am your life, and you begin to accept it as a fact, then I am your strength! You have been pleading and begging for that for seven years. I am your victory in all areas of your life, if you want it! I am the One to whom it is perfectly natural to go out and win souls; and I know precisely where to go and find them. Why don’t you begin to reckon upon Me and say thank you”? Another of the Lord’s statements to him caught my attention. “Now you have to realize; you cannot have My life for your program. You can only have My life for My program”. Major Ian Thomas went to be with the Lord at the age of 92yrs after a full life of writing, and Ministry around the world.

As always Jesus is our foremost example of a life submitted to God’s grace. He chose to be fully available to His Father. Christ’s life on earth was commitment to the Fathers program. “Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner”. (John 5:19) It is remarkable that He submitted His speech to His Father also. “For I did not speak on my own initiative, but the Father himself

who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak". (John 12:49)

Many preachers throughout history have discovered that to be effective they needed to wait on God, listen, and speak only that which God had given them. F. F. Bosworth, an Evangelist in the U.S. in the early 1900's, had many healings accompany his preaching. Each night while conducting an outreach he placed a pad and pen near his bed. God woke him in the night and gave him the next day's sermon. He wrote it all down and went back to sleep. That sermon preached the next day always produced mighty results for the Kingdom of God.

Some, being human, missed it occasionally and had to backtrack into Gods revealed instruction. I have a tape by T.L.Osborn on which he speaks about his first crusade in Thailand. Knowing the small penetration of the Gospel in that country, he decided to present the Gospel in an academic fashion. He expected the manifestation of marvellous works of God that always broke out in his meetings. In Thailand, at this first crusade meeting, nothing happened. The people were unmoved - contempt and disregard for his message being the only result. Shaken by this Osborn sought God for the solution. It came when the Lord said to him, "You explained the Gospel, I told you to preach the Gospel". That was a revelation to me. I had not realised there was a difference. Explaining is just talking. Preaching has enthusiasm and emotion in it. For T.L.Osborn at least, enthusiasm and emotion were the ingredients God wanted. By not preaching he had moved out of the circumference of God's grace.

It would be a mistake to think that submission to the grace of God is a passive hum-drum existence. Paul told us in the reference at the beginning of this article, making himself

available to God's grace enabled him to work harder than all the other apostles. John tells us if all the works of Jesus had been recorded the world would not be enough to accommodate the books. (John 21:25) Jesus obviously saw the Father in constant activity.

Have you noticed the weakest and most unlikely people are God's choice for his biggest works? After teaching them to be available to his grace within them, an explosion of his activity through them is the result. T.L.Osborn the seventh son of a struggling farming family, had travelled no further than the nearest town before God called him. Oral Roberts was a stuttering student dying of tuberculosis. Kenneth Hagin, a young man bedridden with a serious heart condition. Benny Hinn also stuttered and lacked confidence. An impoverished, timid, farmers wife, Maria Woodworth-Etter struggled to obey God's call to preach when very few women were in positions of prominence. Kenneth and Gloria Copeland continually battled financial failure. God used all these and many more like them, once His grace had free rein in them, to save, heal and bless millions.

Apostle Neil Thomas, a mentor of mine, whom God used to plant churches in the South Pacific, would often say, "I just walk around behind the Holy Spirit". A few times he said to me after a great teaching session, "You could do this Ross - it's by God's grace". I have heard David Herzog say, "God does it all and makes me look good." The truth is we are all in the same boat with those chosen by God for huge ministries. 2 Corinthians 4:7 says, "For we have this treasure (God's presence) in earthen vessels (us) that the surpassing greatness of the power might be of God and not from ourselves".

Whether called to minister to millions, or like most of us, our

service for God is to workmates and neighbours; we will not have the satisfaction of seeing lasting results if we don't embrace the truth of the operation of God's grace working through us. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and they are life". (John 6:63) If we wish to offer life to the spiritually dead around us it must happen through our availability too, and union with the Holy Spirit. It is a life that is learned as we make ourselves available to a close relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

If you study the lives of those used by God in large ministries their availability and dependence upon God quickly becomes obvious. I was watching a video of Kenneth Copeland preaching in Africa. He stopped in mid sermon and asked the Lord how to continue in his next comments. He waited in silence listening. After a moment he said, "Thank you sir", and continued with the sermon. A lady with an evil spirit had come on stage at a Benny Hinn open air meeting I attended in Australia. He described the Holy Spirit's instruction to him about the evil spirit, and before casting it out said the Holy Spirit was telling him to stand back. That surprised me. I realised then how available, dependant and obedient these Ministers need to be. Wanting to be sure his ministry will have God's power, Brazilian evangelist Carlos Anacondia often hangs back on decisions about the work until God presses him about it. That way he is sure he is in the flow of God's grace and sure of results. Again, when I read that it surprised me because my thinking was that I should get moving as soon as I had the slightest clue what God wanted me to do. Annacondia knows only God's program wins souls, and he takes care to be in alignment with it.

Paul worked harder than the other apostles by God's grace, but

he also knew how to sit still when God asked it of him. Acts 19:9,10 tells us Paul stopped his evangelistic travelling at one point and spent two years in the one place teaching the word and praying for the people. His agenda was God's agenda, not his own. In two verses Ephesians 2:8,9 sums up the whole principle of living in God's grace. "For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast".

HE (JESUS) IS OUR PEACE

We have peace with God when we put our faith in Jesus. Immediately thereafter, by Gods graciousness, we become the recipients of the peace of God. Jesus said it was His own peace passed to us. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. I once heard a testimony by a preacher who had been sharing the Gospel with a group of bikers. One of the group challenged him to take a ride as passenger on a Harley. The Minister agreed and off they went at top speed. The passenger said he felt the peace of God descend upon him as soon as he was on the bike and was relaxed and confident for the whole trip even though they reached speeds well above the limit and the bike leaned at a dangerous angle on the corners. Afterwards the Minister astounded them all by saying he had enjoyed the ride. The biker admitted that he had given himself a scare on the ride.

Recently I read of an older Christian man who had gone into hospital for a straight forward surgery. He awoke to have the Doctor tell him it had become apparent during the surgery that his condition was more serious than they had thought, and what they had done would mean a considerable change in lifestyle for him. This is how he described that moment. He quoted 2 Thessalonians 3:16: "Now may the Lord Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all". Then he explained, "when I first found out, coming out of the fog of anaesthesia after surgery that the surgeon had found

complications and there would need to be further treatment, I felt no anxiety only peace. Can I be honest with you? That's just not a natural response, that's just not my typical response, that's not me! In these anxiety inducing moments the Lord God almighty is instead choosing to guard my heart and mind with his peace".

Isn't that a great prayer by Paul in 2 Thessalonians? "Now may the Lord Himself give you peace always and in every way". No doubt it sprung from the experience of Paul and his companions as they travelled. They could not rely on any sort of peace keeping force as we are able to do. From Paul's description of their experience in 2 Corinthians which included perils from robbers, perils from false brethren and perils in both the city and the country, they relied upon God's help and peace daily. Their ability to keep going in the face of constant threat and some traumatic experiences, is only explained by the Lord's bestowal of supernatural peace. That may have been in the Lord's mind when He spoke to His disciples, "My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives give I unto you". He knew their external circumstances would often be far from peaceful, and He wanted them to be looking to His peace within them to get them through.

The world seeks peace through external means. It is exemplified in day to day speech by such statements as, "Go and leave me in peace" and "I need some peace and quiet". God's peace begins in our spirits; The fruit of the Spirit is... peace. Only in relationship with God through Christ is true peace found. C S Lewis said, "God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there, there is no such thing". The world talks much about peace but can never find it. "There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked". (Isa

48:22) It is significant that many of the winners of the Nobel peace prize were persecuted, imprisoned, and some killed, for simply campaigning for peace between people and nations.

Jesus explained that the disciples had a part to play to benefit from the peace of God within them when He said, "My peace I give to you...let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid". Of course, that instruction is also for us. Not allowing our hearts to be troubled or afraid covers anything we might experience in this life. Jesus knew what the future held for the disciples. They were the ground breakers for the spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. He knew there would be persecution, hardship and even martyrdom for some of them, and this was how they were to handle it; 'Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid'. I think of it as faith work. They had some faith work to do. It challenged me as I wrote this - how well do I apply those words of Jesus? It is one thing to read Christ's words and another thing altogether to apply them in our real-life situations. I think Jesus gave those instructions because He knew if being troubled and fearful had free reign they would block the manifestation of the peace of God. Of course, God can overrule in our situations and He often does, but I think we do well to make the effort to keep our peace and resist fear, and to trust our relationship with the God of peace.

Isaiah calls Jesus the Prince of peace. Paul, in Ephesians says, "For He Himself is our peace". I have experienced the fulfillment of that Scripture when, in particularly tough times the Lord has shown Himself to me in some way. I am sure many readers have the same testimony. There is nothing like the presence of Jesus to bring peace and give a new perspective on a difficult circumstance. Not so long ago I found myself in Hospital because of the sudden onset of urinary tract infection. I did my

praying, receiving, and believing, but it quickly became obvious I was supposed to get medical help. What I had expected to be one visit to the Emergency section, turned into six days in Hospital. It was just a matter of waiting for a course of antibiotics to take effect. The doctor assured me they had done laboratory analysis and had come up with the perfect pill to fix my condition. I was not feeling much better by the third day - added to that I was experiencing increasingly bizarre sensations in my head and body. The nurses checked me over but could find nothing wrong.

It had been a rush to get to emergency and I had no time to grab a Bible or anything else for that matter. I decided it was time to have the word of God with me, and I found a Gideon Bible in a recreation room. I was tense about my situation by then. I got back into bed and as my head touched the pillow, I was suddenly walking on a dirt track up a grass covered hill. I looked up to the summit of the hill and there was Jesus, standing and looking down at me. Then just as suddenly I was aware of myself in bed again. That experience gave me peace and strength. It eventually came to light I was allergic to the penicillin antibiotics they were giving me and a change of medication fixed the problem.

This article made me realise I need to become better acquainted with the Lords peace which is within me, and to apply my faith to receive its' fullest benefits.

THE DIVINE BODYGUARD

Every Christian lives under the watchful eye of God. We have an adversary whom Jesus called a murderer, who comes for nothing but to steal, kill and destroy. (John 8:44, 10:10) God keeps and protects us whether we realise it or not. I have had that confirmed in my own life several times. Before each of those manifestations of God's protection I was blissfully unaware I would need His help until the incident was upon me.

I was looking for ways to be involved in evangelism when I first came to the Lord and decided to join Open Air Campaigners an outreach ministry in Auckland, New Zealand. I was walking across town to my first strategy and prayer meeting with the group when at one point I stepped off the curb to cross a street. I happened to glance to my right and saw a car approaching. At the very instant of my looking I saw the driver turn the car towards me and put his foot down on the accelerator. I realised I was one step ahead of the devil's plans and was able to step back up onto the footpath as the car shot past me. The driver had a blank expression on his face and did not seem to be fully aware of what he was doing. I watched the car turn into a parking area further up the road and the driver walk off to a shopping area. I decided to test just how aware of me the driver was. He was walking in the shopping area. I got well in front of him, then turned and walked directly towards him. I got close to him and looked him in the eye. He did not show a flicker of recognition. I think he was hardly conscious of what he had been compelled to do.

My job at the street open air meetings was to mingle with the crowd of listeners, notice who seemed interested in the presentation, then try to start a conversation with them about the preaching. If there was not much of a crowd, I would try to share the Gospel with people passing by. One afternoon we had not managed to attract any listeners. I approached a workman passing by and asked if he knew Jesus had died for his sins. He stopped and turned to face me and said, "Son, if you say one more word to me I'll knock your head off". I would have been perfectly happy to let it go at that, but as he spoke I became aware of a huge evil spirit coming from him that seemed to me to be thirty to forty feet high. At that moment I knew, I, as an ordinary person, stood no chance against the thing. Though there was nothing to see physically, I had my head back looking up. Before I had time to think further I saw a shimmering spiritual circle appear and gradually descend around both of us. I knew it was God's protection. The man turned on his heel and walked off as though nothing had happened.

At another time, I approached a young Maori man and spoke to him about the Gospel. We looked at each other and I could tell he had decided to punch me. Immediately we both knew that he was unable to do it. He turned and walked off. I, being young and zealous, noticed he had stopped a little further up the road. I ran up to him and began speaking about the Gospel again. This time he stood and listened with a bewildered look on his face.

One final incident happened on a Saturday afternoon. I had turned up to the place we were to have our outreach. I was surprised to find the area where our team should have been preparing, completely empty. I stood there for a while wondering if I had made a mistake on the location of the

outreach. A man came around the corner where I was standing and walked straight up to me. He seemed drunk but was speaking quite clearly. He told me of a meeting in the Church opposite us, and that he had come to cause trouble there. He wanted me to come with him and have some fun interrupting the meeting. He kept reaching out to take hold of my shirt front and I could tell the power of God was stopping him from doing so. He told me something of his past and I decided the Church meeting might do him some good. I said I was going home but would go with him to the door of the Church and vouch for him to get in if he behaved himself. I did that and after one more warning to behave himself, I left him in the hands of an usher.

Later, they told me our team had heard an American ministry named the Agape Force, was having a meeting at the Church and had cancelled the outreach to attend. I was informed my man, Buddy was his name, had been directed to a seat by the usher. At once the many spirits that were in him began to shout out and make a tremendous noise. They got him to the front of the meeting somehow, and it took four men to hold him, with one big Minister sitting on him at one stage. They were able to deliver him of many of the spirits but not all of them. I prayed for Buddy a lot after that, though I heard nothing of him again.

A young Evangelist on the team had a dissimilar experience to mine. It's an example of something we can't ignore in any discussion of God's protection. After sharing the Gospel with a young man on the street, he asked if he would like to pray and receive Jesus. The man said yes but not in view of all the people gathered. Could they go around the corner where they would be alone? Once around the corner and out of sight, the man punched the Evangelist and gave him a black eye. We must admit that sometimes God allows hardship and even

suffering. Psalm 91 is about God's protection for those that love Him. Verse fifteen of the Psalm always draws my attention. "I will be with him in trouble". Sometimes God's protection takes the form of His being with us during hardship. Paul counselled Timothy to, "take your share of hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ". (2Tim 2:3)

When you study the lives of prominent men and women of God it doesn't take long to notice the wide variety in their experience. Some seemed to have almost no hardship at all, while others went through great struggles. John Wesley's open-air preaching placed him in constant danger, but I have not found one instance where he came to harm physically. A demonic man rushed through the crowd while Wesley was preaching in a town square, threatening to kill him. He reached Wesley and began stroking his hair and exclaiming, "What a lovely man, what a lovely man". That sort of thing happened a lot during Wesley's outdoor preaching, and he always had God's protection. He was quite willing to suffer hardship for the Gospel. He believed hardship and persecution was a sign of God's approval of his work. While riding to a preaching appointment one day, he became concerned about the recent lack of persecution. He stopped and dismounted to pray about the situation. A farmer took exception to him stopping near his land and threw a stone that hit Wesley on the back. Wesley took that to be God's sign of his continued approval of the ministry, and he remounted and rode off with renewed confidence.

Sadhu Sundar Singh, the converted Sikh who wandered through India preaching the Gospel between 1900 and 1920, had God's protection many times. He also had many demanding times. At one time he had tried to preach the Gospel to a village and

been driven away by the people. He walked until night fall then lay down to sleep in the forest. At day-light he awoke to see many of the people from the village standing around staring at him. They told him they had come during the night to kill him. Their plans came to nothing when they saw tall shining men standing around his sleeping figure. Often though, he had to endure some suffering before being miraculously delivered. In another instance, after capture by a group of people, he was bound, and leeches placed all over his body. I can't recall how he got out of that circumstance. I do remember him saying he found that very hard to endure.

George Ritchie tells a more modern example of God's protection in his book 'Return from Tomorrow'. A young Christian soldier in France during the second world war, he was glad to be granted a few days leave away from the battle ground. He was in jubilant mood as he climbed aboard the transport with his companions, happy to have even a few days away from the fighting. To his astonishment he heard a voice from within say to him, "get off the truck". He knew it was God but could not understand why he was being denied a much-needed leave. After arguing for a while and getting the same four words in response, he dejectedly climbed down from the truck and another soldier took his place. It was not long before news came back; the truck had run over mines in the road, and all onboard died.

One of my heroes of the faith is Antony of the desert, a Christian hermit born in the year 250. He was an Egyptian and a different person than the more widely known St Anthony. Antony wrote nothing himself. All that is known about him comes from a book on his life written by Athanasius. Somewhere between eighteen and twenty years of age, he had

given away all his possessions to follow an ascetic lifestyle. There being no Monasteries at that time, any who wanted the life of seclusion lived in caves or anywhere they found suitable shelter. After taking time to learn from older Christian recluses, Antony withdrew to a disused tomb near to a village.

Immediately he was attacked by evil spirits who tried every sort of temptation and subtlety, to persuade him to abandon his discipleship. After failing in every attempt, the spirits attacked him physically leaving him unconscious and near death. The person from the village who brought him food every few days found him in that condition. They carried him to the village and gave as much care as they were able.

When Antony regained consciousness, he insisted the villagers take him back to the tomb. The spirits came again in the form of all sorts of animals and there was much noise and an earthquake that damaged the tomb. Antony's response; (in today's English) "Here I am, have another try. If you had any power over me, just one of you would have killed me before now. Faith in the Lord Jesus is a seal and a wall of safety to us. If you can do nothing more why do you bother to remain"? The spirits made many attempts but were unable to hurt him further. It then seemed as if the roof of the tomb opened and a shaft of light shone through. The evil spirits disappeared, the tomb restored, and Antony felt all the pain leave his body and his strength return. He experienced the presence of Jesus, and I like Antony's immediate response; "Where were you Lord? Why did you not appear at the beginning to make all of my pains cease"? The Lord said He had been present the whole time but had waited to see the outcome of the conflict. He promised Antony Divine support for the rest of his life, and that his name would become known everywhere. The promise was fulfilled in Antony's lifetime and after by the book Athanasius wrote.

When it comes to God's protection, our part is to trust. Jesus said we would have tribulation in this world. (John 16:33) We also have many promises. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms". (Deut 33:27) "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro though the whole earth, to show himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him". (2Chron 16:9)

CONQUERORS IN THE MIDST

The 'more than conquerors' statement of Romans 8:37 is often used out of context by those of us who live in the more peaceful areas of world. It is easy to sidestep the two earlier verses in this chapter by Paul. "Who shall ever separate us from Christ's love"? "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword"? "As it is written; For your sake, we are killed, all day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter". (Romans 8:35,36) Then we get the proper context. "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us".

This week I received the monthly newsletter of the 'Every Home for Christ' Ministry. They have a section called the voice of persecuted Christians report. Here is some of this month's report on India; 'Attacks against Christians have been rising at an alarming rate, according to news reports. They describe an upswing in politically motivated attacks since the March 2017 elections which saw a landslide victory for Hindu nationalists. The latest report of the All India Council records an increase of almost 20% in attacks against Christians in 2016. It says physical violence against Christians is up nearly 40% and murders have doubled in states across India. Church workers have been beaten, threatened, and killed. Attempts have been made to force Christians to renounce their faith and convert to Hinduism. Church services and prayer meetings have been disrupted, Churches and Christian schools bombed, torched, vandalised, and demolished. Bibles have been torn to pieces

and burnt'. It continues with more graphic accounts.

I thought as I read that, how much more meaningful Paul's words would be to those Christians than to me in my present circumstances. Paul is describing his own experience and it seems, the experience of some of his fellow Christians. From a purely human point of view, what he says is nonsensical. When was the last time you read in the newspapers of people suffering famine, persecution, earthquakes, violence, and the like, and it carried on to say they were great victors amid those events. In our human thinking the two don't fit together. Having the experience of the Indian Christians and being not just conquerors, but more than conquerors amid that. It is a mindset that is foreign to ordinary human thinking, yet the New Testament shows its acceptance as basic by the first Christians.

Whatever our outward circumstances, the most important part of what Paul is saying is in v37. "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us". The apostle is on his favourite theme here. For him it is always all about Jesus. He tells us how to be more than conquerors in all circumstances. Through Him that loved us. Our reliance upon Jesus is two-fold. He loved us by giving Himself to pay for our sins and we trust Him to save us. Then we live for God through Him. How was Paul able to be more than a conqueror in all the hardship he suffered? He tells us in Philippians 4:13. "For I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power". (Living Bible) Paul demonstrates for us the Christian life is an exchanged life.

He talks about it in many ways in the New Testament. In Galatians he says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who

loved me and gave Himself for me". (Gal 2:20) The transformation of the apostle's life is such that his faith is the faith of the Son of God. In Colossians he writes, "For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in Glory". (Col 3:3,4)

Being more than a conqueror is a very personal thing between you and Jesus. The report on persecution in India gives the overall record on what is happening. Were we able to talk with the Christians going through those things we would hear many stories of Christ's support and intervention in their trials. In a way, the New Testament gives a general report on Christian living. A new personal story happens in each of our lives. The blessing of Christianity is that it is not a set of religious rules we all follow, but a very personal relationship with God who can have an individual relationship with each and every-one of us. The Lord has chosen that Paul shares his personal experience with Jesus as a guide for us as we live our own story with Jesus. During the time of the Jesus people movement there was a song entitled; 'Me and Jesus, we've got our own thing going'. That is the message we hear from Paul when-ever he writes about his life.

The book of Ephesians gives us more information on being more than conquerors using the metaphor of the armour of a Roman soldier. The foundation for that teaching in Ephesians 6, is verse 10. It is the exchanged life again. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might". All the teaching that comes afterwards builds upon the bedrock of verse 10. If you think about it a bit, verse 10 is definitely a 'more than conquerors' statement. How to have what I am talking about, says Paul, is to be immersed in the Lord's

strength, power and might. Now we can see why he uses the term 'more' than conquerors. If we think of persecution and affliction on one side of the scales and Gods strength, power and might on the other, it is no contest. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us "? (Romans 8:31)

It is good to remember also that the apostle is not giving us academic theory. This man after stoning by a faction of the Jews, was dragged out of the city, and left to die. The Christians gathered around him and prayed. He stood up and walked back into the city. The next day he left the city to continue travelling and preaching the Gospel. (Acts 14:19,20) How could that happen? In the Lords strength, power and might. I often think about 2 Corinthians 4:17 where Paul describes his hardships as "Our light affliction".

Moving on in Ephesians 6, we see our job is to stand against the wiles of the devil. Ultimately, spiritual evil is behind any trouble we encounter as we live for God. (Ephes 6: 11,12,13) The word 'wiles' can be translated as schemes, strategies, tactics, deceits and artifices. James 4:7 says, "Therefore submit yourselves unto God. Stand up against the devil and he will flee from you". The word 'resist' is used in some translations. I live in Australia and I am a rugby league fan. As in American football, the aim of each team is to get across the opposing teams touchdown line and to prevent that team from crossing your line. Most game contact is one on one encounters between players. Many players have mastered the art of stopping an opposition member running at them at full speed, by standing up against him with full frontal body contact. I have marvelled many times at seeing a large player bounce back off that sort of tackle, sometimes from a smaller man. Sometimes that sort of

resistance injures the running player.

That reminds me of God's will for us. Using the whole armour of God we can stand up against the wiles of the devil and cause them to bounce back off us and flee. "Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil". We must master the art of putting on the whole armour of God. Paul says we will be able to withstand in the evil day of danger by taking up the whole armour of God. The Amplified Bible puts it like this; "Therefore put on God's complete armour, that you may be able to resist and stand your ground on the evil day of danger, and having done all the crisis demands, to stand firmly in your place". (Ephes 6:13)

I have done it myself, and I know of other Christians doing the same. We take a few moments in prayer and say, "God I am putting on your armour. Right now, I gird my waist with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness. I lift the shield of faith. I put on the helmet of salvation, and I take the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Satisfied that we have it all, we march out into our day. Perhaps like me, you found it was a good reminder of those verses, but other than that, it made very little difference to your experience. I don't believe that is the way Paul expected us to do it.

Let's look at each part of the armour briefly; "Loins gird about with truth". I think this means having a thorough knowledge of the truth. It is important to understand all Jesus obtained, or gave to us, through the New Testament in His blood. He came to deal with sin and to make it of no account for those who receive His salvation. Jesus is called the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". Hebrews says, "He put away sin by the sacrifice of himself". (John 1:29) (Heb 9:26) That was Jesus' main mission. It is imperative to have the full

experience of that truth.

“Having put on the breastplate of righteousness”. This is tied to the earlier paragraph. “He made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”. (2Cor 5:21) The devil’s defeat is established when we know we are the righteousness of God in Christ.

“Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace”. To be always alert for God’s direction to preach the gospel, whenever and wherever He directs, puts us in a place of blessedness and power the enemy has no answer for.

“Above all taking the shield of faith”. Faith is believing the Word of God to be true above and beyond everything else. Faith is accepting the written word of the Bible as true, regardless of feelings or circumstances. The fiery darts of evil are extinguished when we say, “God you said it, I believe it, that settles it”. (Martin Luther)

“And take the helmet of salvation”. Another Scripture calls this “the helmet of the hope of salvation”. (1Thess 5:8) We often see in the New Testament, the disciples walking into circumstances they were not expecting and had no warning about. The imprisonment of Paul and Silas is an example. They put on the helmet of salvation by having the attitude that God would eventually come to their aid. It has to do with a mindset that knows God will come to our aid, wherever and whenever we need it.

“Take the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God”. Of this Scripture, Adam Clarke has this to say; “The sword of which Paul speaks is what we call the Holy Scriptures. This is called the sword of the Spirit because it comes from the Holy Spirit

and receives its' fulfillment in the soul through the operation of the Holy Spirit. An ability to quote this (God's Word) on proper occasions, and especially in times of trial and temptation, has a wonderful tendency to cut in pieces the snares of the adversary". (Clarke's Commentary)

I am sure Paul intended any reading of the whole armour of God to include verse 18. "Pray all the time. Ask God for anything in line with the Holy Spirit's wishes. Plead with Him, reminding Him of your needs, and keep praying earnestly for all Christians everywhere". (Living Bible)

IT'S NOT OVER UNTIL I WIN

Any discussion on what Christians have authority over, what we should never accept, and discerning what comes from God and what doesn't, should be firmly based upon Jesus' sin atonement. Once we genuinely receive Christ's salvation sin is no longer reckoned to us. That being the case, all the results of sin in the world no longer have any right or authority to harass us.

These few verses in Mathew illustrate the truth of that fact. "When evening was come they brought to Him (Jesus) many who were under the power of demons. And he cast out the spirits with a word. And He healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying; He himself took our infirmities and bore our diseases". Jesus' salvation was such a certainty that it is told here as a fact before the physical event. We also have that mysterious word that Jesus is; "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world". (Rev 13:8) I prefer the Amplified Bible version of the Mathew quote. "He Himself took (to carry away) our weaknesses and infirmities and bore away our diseases". (Math 8:16,17)

Jesus here removes the major problems caused by sin in people's lives. The works of the devil, sickness, and infirmity. Verse 17 tells us He was able to do this because He took sin upon Himself, and the conditions resulting from sin, and carried it all away from us. The Isaiah reference is chapter 53. The

most comprehensive explanation of all that Jesus did for us in his atonement is here. Space does not allow for quotation of the whole chapter. Here is a list of all that Christ removed from us through His suffering, death, burial, and resurrection. We should recognize that not one of these conditions has any authority or right to come within three metres of a Christian (to quote John G Lake)

We have freedom from; despising, rejection, sorrow, sickness, weakness, distress, oppression, grief, disease, affliction, lack of peace, going astray from God, iniquity, and sin. It's important that we recognize the word of God is emphatic about these things. In the Mathew reference, we see Jesus revealing the will of God to deliver from all demonic attack and all sickness. We have established that the list in Isaiah does not come from God.

Our authority is in Christ who has all power and authority. I like 1Cor3:21-23; "Therefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come - all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's". The Lord's authority is worked out in our lives through our relationship with Him. In that relationship, we can learn to exercise that authority once we accept that we have it.

What should Christians never accept? For me non - acceptance means an attitude based on what God has revealed in His word. We should recognize that while we are on the earth we are in a fight. (1Tim 6:12) CeCe Wynans, in the words of one of her songs, called this world 'the battleground'. The following is my understanding of what God asks of us regarding not accepting anything Christ has freed us from. Jesus talked much about faith, in the Gospels. In many instances before He met a person's need He asked for a confession of faith from them. He

was always saying," Have faith in God". This shows us the importance of putting faith between what God's word says and our receiving the fulfilment of it.

John teaches us the same principle. "For you are of God little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world". (1John 4:4) You might say John has given us the theory of victory in those words. A little further on he adds to that statement. "And whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith". (1John5:4) He gives us the theory - then says faith activates it.

This is how I do it in practise. If an evil spirit attacks me, I firstly say that I have authority over it and I tell it to leave me. Then I resist it by using the sword of the Spirit which is speaking the word of God. My favourites being; "Therefore, submit to God, resist the devil and He will flee from you. (James 4:7) and, "Resist him (the devil) steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world". (1Pet5:9) I then believe that all those things have had and are having effect. Hebrews admonishes us; "...do not become sluggish but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises". (Heb 6:12) Therefore I set myself to resist with the patience and endurance God supplies. Knowing I have done all that I can do, I look to God to be my helper and support.

If I find myself in a battle with sickness or infirmity (even a cold) I do the same sort of thing. I declare that Christ has freed me from all sickness or infirmity. I say that I agree with the word of God which says I am healed and receive my healing. "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose

stripes you were healed". (1Pet2:24) Sometimes I will ask God to heal me or give me the manifestation of Christ's healing. Sometimes I lay my hands on myself and receive the promise; "they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover". (Mark 16:18) Again I accept all that by faith and look to God for help and support. I think it is important to hold to a confession of Christ's finished work on our behalf, and to endeavour not to say anything to the contrary. Self-effort does not come into it but a faith reliance upon God who is very willing to help us. He responds to our determination to have faith.

Patience is important. I learned much about faith from the writing of Norvel Hayes. Most of what I have just said came from his books. In one book he gives the example of an injury he had to one of his knees. He received, believed, and had patience for three months before the healing manifested. I have had several needs where I have had to be patient and hold to faith, sometimes for years, before seeing the required result. One thing I have noticed, if I am doing my best to put faith into action and it is taking a long time, God will support me in many ways to help me get through while the need exists. I am in full agreement with motivational speaker Les Brown: "It's not over until I win".

DEBT, CREDIT, AND GODS PEOPLE

We can start with the book of Deuteronomy in a search for what the Bible has to say about the people of God and debt. This book is a series of sermons spoken by Moses to the children of Israel just before their crossing of the Jordan river into the promised land. The fifteenth chapter sets a principle supported throughout the Bible: "But there will be no poor among you, for the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess. If only you carefully listen to the voice of the Lord your God, to do watchfully all those commandments which I command you this day. When the Lord your God blesses you as He promised you, then you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you". (Deuteronomy 15:4-6)

We have it here directly from Gods mouth the results of His blessing: "There shall be no poor among you, you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you". The first fifteen verses of this chapter are about having and managing material wealth. Ruling over nations and not having them ruling over Gods people seems to be out of place – another subject altogether. Or is God connecting ruling or being ruled over with having or not having material abundance? The subject will come up again later in this discussion about debt. We should take notice here also the prerequisites for God blessing the children of Israel: "If only you carefully listen to the voice of the Lord

your God, to do watchfully all those commandments which I command you this day". Isn't this a description of a close relationship with God and His word? Carefully listening and watchful to do all the commandments describes a radical commitment of the life to God. The automatic result of that commitment is being able to lend and not having to borrow – having no debt.

That's Old Testament you might be thinking – what does the New Testament teach us on the subject? Paul in Romans thirteen is writing to people who have received Jesus salvation – who have entered a committed relationship with God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In verse eight of the chapter he says, "Keep out of debt (Amplified Bible) Owe no man anything, except to love one another.." There we have it clear and simple. How about material abundance? Jesus gave us direction about that: "Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they shall pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return". (Luke 6:38) I am sure about these principles now and I live by them daily. But only by the grace of Gods teaching and some hard lessons learnt.

I have known about the principle of giving to receive for many years and have always tried to put it into practise. I was not living in abundance though and that caused my giving to be sporadic. Eventually I decided I would do what everybody else was doing and obtained a credit card with a one-thousand-dollar limit. Because it was a while ago I can't remember if I noticed changes in my Christian experience right away. I certainly remember and will never forget the crisis day. I was driving a taxi at the time and on this day, I suddenly began to feel ill – something to do with my digestive system. I claimed

healing in prayer and tried to carry on. A business man hailed me for the airport. On the way I became so ill I had to stop on the freeway, lie on the back seat, and let the business man drive the cab to the airport. I felt a little better after a while and decided to drive the freeway back to the city. Again, on the freeway I became so ill I had to pull over and get out of the taxi. I was on a one lane off ramp and my stopping blocked traffic on that ramp and back onto the freeway. I was too sick to help myself and another driver rung an ambulance. When the ambulance arrived, I was beginning to feel okay again and was eventually able to drive home. More was involved in the sickness that I won't go into, suffice to say it was a frustrating and embarrassing experience. The most annoying thing was that I seemed to be getting ill at the most inconvenient times - then suddenly recovering again. I was not able to keep on working and had to go home early.

Once home I began asking the Lord why this was happening to me. What came to my mind was a CD I had by Kenneth Copeland and something he had said on the CD about debt. I played it through and discovered he had quoted Proverbs 22:7: "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender". Some translations say 'slave' rather than servant. He then asked the rhetorical question, "Should a Christian be a servant (slave) to an ungodly lender"? Then he gave me my answer by saying, "That lender might be under a curse and you have become his servant". The word servant in that verse also means; slave, to bind oneself to slavish dependence, to be obligated too, to bind himself, to be subject too, to twist around or to wind. By taking that credit card and continually owing on it I had put myself in that position. I repented of my mistake, paid the card off as soon as I could - then cancelled it. A debit card now gives me credit card facility using my own money.

Since that time, I have discovered something about giving that has become an important principle I am careful to live by. Previously I had given, most of the time, without asking Gods guidance. I would see a need that appealed to me and I would give to it spontaneously hoping for a return. It became obvious I was not getting the return Jesus spoke about. In frustration I reduced my giving to a tithe and small offering to my church group. I was getting by but was not living in abundance. One day while at a coffee shop the Holy Spirit surprised me by telling me to give a definite amount of money to a Christian organisation. Over the next couple of months, He directed me to give specific amounts in other directions. All of that giving was regular monthly commitments to Christian work. It seems that I should have been asking Gods direction about giving and that was why I was not seeing a return. These days I never give anything large until I am sure I have Gods direction. His return to me has been such that I have developed a confidence about His supply I did not have before.

I don't think we should be concerned about giving expecting a return. Jesus was clear that we would get a return. Most Christians would give at Gods direction and be happy to do so for no return - a return means we are able to give more at Gods direction while having the blessing of having our own needs abundantly met. I can give a testimony of what God can do to get us out of debt once we have decided to line ourselves up with His word. A few years back I heard that Kenneth and Gloria Copeland would be holding meetings on the Gold Coast in Australia where I live. I decided I would go up for the weekend. It was an uplifting time and at the last meeting Rev. Copeland said God had told him He would do financial miracles for those who would give in today's offering collection. I did not have any money with me and had to go in search of an ATM. When I

returned the collection had finished. I approached an usher and said I wanted to give and would he hand the money in. He was reluctant but finally agreed to do so.

I had some outstanding debt that in the ordinary run of things would take me a long time to pay with the income I had at the time. I expected instant results, but it didn't happen. As weeks turned into months I became disappointed and finally had to leave it with the Lord in faith - putting it out of my mind. One year after my weekend on the Gold Coast the Australian Tax Department cancelled my \$20,000 debt with them, voluntarily and without request from me.

I recently read this testimony by a Christian lady caught in the housing foreclosure crisis. She was left with a deficiency bill of \$40,000 after the sale of her home.

"On March 3, 2011, I went to see a tenant of some of my rental properties. She had lost her job in the fall of 2010 and I had her skip rent for one of the months when I learned that she lost her job. So, I went to her home in March and asked her if she still was out of work. She said yes. I said well skip rent this month and we'll see where you are next month. She said, 'I already paid for this month'. I said I will get it from the mail box and return it to you. I recall the Lord saying how He will bless me for that. I went to my mailbox and got her check that she had mailed. Then, I saw a letter from the second lender with the deficiency and the letter voluntarily waived any deficiency that I had!!! I thought to myself — wow! We cannot out give God! I am returning my tenant's \$525 money order and He removed \$40,000 of a deficiency that I had with a lender! I returned the check to the tenant who was so grateful". (www.christian-faith.com/testimony-on-debt-relief)

We live in a day when credit card debt and large loans of various sorts are accepted as the norm. The counsel from God through Moses at the beginning of this article becomes essential if we are to survive and thrive: "If only you carefully listen to the voice of the Lord your God, to do watchfully all those commandments which I command you this day. When the Lord your God blesses you as He promised you, then you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you". (Deuteronomy 15:4-6)

THANK YOU-LORD

Have you been trying to find God's will in some area of your life? You have prayed about it, but the answers aren't coming. Perhaps you are dealing with some difficult issues that are persisting. Maybe it is a few small irritations that are robbing you of the quality of life you want. I identify with all those issues. None of us gets by without some difficulties. Jesus underlined the fact when He said, "In the world you will have tribulation". (John 16:33) If it's inevitable a struggle or two will come my way, then I want the cleverness to handle those difficulties in the best way. If God has given directions for dealing with life, then it is wisdom to take notice of that instruction and act on it.

That brings us to a verse in 1Thessalonians 5:18. "In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus". Firstly, if we are not sure of God's will in every other part of our lives, here we are certain of God's will in at least one thing - we are to give thanks. Secondly, we have here some information on how to handle tribulations - Give thanks. Notice it says, 'in everything'. Whatever we find ourselves 'in' we are to give thanks. And it is all encompassing. In 'everything' give thanks. Every experience that might come to us is included here. Have you seen those old wartime posters of Uncle Sam pointing a large finger at the reader with the caption, 'Uncle Sam needs YOU'? This verse reminds me of that poster. The large hand and finger of Scripture points at me and the caption reads, "This is God's will for YOU in Christ Jesus.

The Lord made it clear to me as a new Christian, He wanted me to make a habit of giving thanks in my new life. I thought it was marvellous that God had given me this awesome revelation about living for Him. I put it into practise until the first difficult circumstance came across my path. I stopped right there and did not think about it again for years. The Lord gave me a quick path to maturity and a door through which He could enter to bless me, and I missed it.

It's about obedience because the New Testament has a lot of teaching on being thankful. The problem is, giving thanks in all things, pleasant or not so pleasant, is a spiritual activity. Being thankful in difficult circumstances does not appeal to the flesh - our humanity. When I thought about it I recognized I gave thanks in difficult circumstances for a time, but when it did not instantly remove the challenging thing I quit. I did not have enough maturity to understand when God gives an instruction it will always result in blessing.

Ephesians 5:20 gives more guidance about being thankful. "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father...". The earlier verse told us to give thanks in all things. Here we are to 'always' give thanks 'for' all things. Giving of thanks should be a regular practise, and for all things. That's all encompassing again. If I lost my job this week I am to give thanks to God for that. If (personal experience) my leg injury I have accepted healing for in faith, continues to be painful and to hinder my mobility, this verse tells me I should thank God for that. Someone might say, "no, that can't be right". What am I to do? Get the scissors and cut those two verses and others about thanks giving out of my Bible? Obviously not. I should submit to the word of God, knowing anything God asks me to do will inevitably result in

blessing. I believe giving thanks in all circumstances is a powerful spiritual activity and not to be taken lightly. I think of it as a spiritual weapon. Giving thanks in all circumstances will always in some way, result in benefits for those who put it into practise. Paul was not asking his readers to do something he was not doing. After he and Silas were beaten with rods and locked in the deepest and filthiest part of the Philippian prison, their response was thanks and praise. (Acts 16:22-25)

We have many good things to be thankful for. We are saved, born again and have eternal life. We have the Bible and the Holy Spirit. We are loved by Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit, and we have the angels available to help us. We can also focus on the many ways God helps and supports us daily. I have one sore leg, but the list of my blessings from God is long. When we thank God in inconvenient situations we declare that God is in control of our lives. We also place ourselves in control of those circumstances. Paul and Silas praised and thanked God knowing, through God, they were not helpless victims of the hardships. The resulting earthquake God sent proved that. I have no doubt they thought it all worth-while when the Jailer and his family were saved,

Paul tells us in Romans 1:21 the ungodly don't thank God. I am practising putting thanks at the beginning of all my praying. Philippians 4:6 says to include thanks giving in every type of prayer. We are not to be anxious for anything but to ask God about everything and be sure to include thanks with it. I have always thought of praise and thanksgiving as separate spiritual actions. Hebrews 13:13-15 gives another view. "Hence let us go out to Him (Jesus) outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. Through Him then, let us continually offer up

a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that gives thanks to His name". The context is thanksgiving during persecution.

I read this thanksgiving testimony recently. "Choosing gratitude helped me to see things in a whole new light. It was no longer about where I was or what was happening in the moment. It was about what I had and what God had done for me. No, my husband is not perfect, but neither am I. My kids don't always listen, and my house still isn't clean – but God has taught me to be grateful for my life anyway. To be thankful for my wonderful children and that we have a place to live. I still have days when depression sinks in, but God always brings me back to His peace and reminds me what He has given me". (Heather Hart)

If you need a nudge over the line about being thankful, the previous testimony is from the book; '21 stories of gratitude' by Shelley Hitz. It's an e-book on Amazon for around \$4.00. Shelley Hitz has two or three other books available on being thankful. Being thankful is not about forcing a positive emotional state. Most of the time I don't feel thankful. I have learned not to allow feelings to control. Giving thanks is a choice just as deciding to pray or going to Church is a choice. I guarantee if you persist in thanking God, if only once or twice a day, you will soon notice a difference in yourself and your circumstances.

FRAGILE OR TOUGH?

I HAVE two cups in my kitchen. They both look much the same – white - same size - same weight. A hidden difference exists between them. I bought a few of one of them, because they were cheap. Not too many of those are left. Every time I bang them on a tap accidentally a piece breaks off and I must throw it away. The other one cost me ten dollars and it is as tough as old boots. I have accidentally knocked it many times and thought uh oh! there goes my ten dollars. But to my surprise it has survived without even the slightest chip.

What am I getting at here? The Bible calls us vessels (cups) for the Masters (God) use. As we look at the New Testament we can see that the first Christians; Paul, Peter, the other Disciples, and the early Church were far from fragile vessels for God. They took a lot of knocks and it did not break them - in fact they expected tough times. It is easy to skip over some of the things the New Testament tells us they went through. James chapter 1v2-4 gives us an idea of their mind set. "Brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So, let it grow, and don't try and squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, (not fragile) strong in character, full and complete". Others echo his comments - 1 Peter chapter 1v 6-7; "So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though the going is rough for a while down here. These trials are only to test your faith to see if it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire

tests gold and purifies it....”

(Romans 8v16-17) “For His Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we really are Gods children. And since we are His children we will share His treasures--for all God gives to His Son Jesus is now ours to. But if we are to share His glory, we must also share His suffering. Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory He will give us later...”.

We don't always understand and appreciate that God is constantly working in our lives to turn us from fragile vessels to non-fragile vessels for Him. From vessels that are easily broken to vessels that are as tough as old boots for God.

Peters further advice to the Christians in his first letter;
“Beloved, don't be surprised at the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you”.

IF, as a Christian, you are experiencing trouble, you are winning!! Over many years and many tough times, I have come to realize that tribulations and trials mean I am doing something RIGHT. If the devil was not worried about you he would leave you alone. He only comes against those that are a threat to him.

We don't hear enough about this in Christian teaching. Jesus said, “In the world you WILL have tribulation, but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world”. (John 16:33)

‘If You Are Going Through Hell – Keep Going’ is the title of a book by Pastor Doug Giles (Florida). Doug has an **unusual** way of expressing himself. This book of his has been a help to me in keeping perspective during hard times. Here are some portions from the book;

Quote; We learned that, according to the Bible, saints experience 'hell' because they are kicking but and taking names for God. A righteous life does not exclude a believer from the blunt end of hell's pool cue. Matter of fact, it guarantees it!! Do you feel like you're being Kentucky fried by the trials of life? Do you feel like God, satan, people and animals secretly loathe you? If you answered yes to either or both of those questions, you're in good company. Some of the most powerful and amazing folks that God has ever used went through prolonged periods of internal and external crud that reeked worse than a sun-dried manatee carcass. And get this; they actually grew - even prospered - through their pain. Yep, they didn't blame God or man, become atheists, start smoking crack, or become bi-curious during their college years just because things didn't go their way. No, they cowboyed up, saw their trials as a gift, embraced whatever discipline God had for them, exercised their faith when under fire and through it all, became holy winners, not haggard whiners!!

You know, in days gone by, tough times were no big deal to the believer, because Christians tended to be a tad bit pluckier back then. Where did they get their holy bulldog resiliency? Well they actually read the Bible, believed it, and understood from the **balance** of Scripture that bad times, as well as good, were promised by Jesus, Moses, and the boys. Therefore, when bad things happened the believers from bygone days did not wail like sirens, move home with mummy, and/or renounce their Christianity because things momentarily were jacked up. No, they rolled with the pain and grew thereby. I know, pretty weird, right? Unquote

HOW DID PAUL SURVIVE?

HAVE you ever noticed that Paul and the Disciples seemed to have a different understanding about the Christian life than a lot of us do today.? We see it when the Disciples came before the Jewish Council in Acts chapter 5 and were told to stop preaching about Jesus. The Council finally let them go after beating them (some versions say flogging them). That would have been a very painful experience, yet we read that the disciples went out from the Council 'rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame and disgrace for Jesus name'.

Later in Acts 16, Paul and Silas are falsely accused, then "beaten with many blows with rods" and put into the deepest dungeon of the prison with their feet in stocks. That dungeon would have been a foul-smelling place and not the place to be when you had open, bleeding, untended wounds as they had. Their response to this treatment was singing. Paul had much of that sort of treatment, the worst being his being stoned and dragged out of the city and left to die. (Acts chapter 14) When you take time to think about that event, it would have been impossible for an ordinary human being to survive. But after the disciples prayed for him he stood up and walked back into the city with them and the next day carried on with his preaching journey.

Though I am sure they did not like that sort of treatment, they seemed to accept it was part of their job description. A while

back I was going through a tough time and I got to thinking what my response would be if I had the dungeon and beating experience of Paul and Silas. I had to face the fact that my attitude would have been a lot different than theirs!

But how did Paul survive? There is no doubt that the miracle power of God was continually at work with him. The New Testament has a couple of references where Paul explains how he was able to live like this; 1 Corinthians 15 v 10 says that he worked harder than all the Apostles put together, "yet not I but the grace of God that was in me". He had allowed God's grace to be his life force.

I think that Galatians 2:20 is the best description of Pauls inner life; "I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in (or by the faith of) the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me".

The early Christians lives are examples for us. By faith we must take the same grace from God if we are to succeed in our own living.

THE BLESSING OF NEW TESTAMENT HOLINESS

Work, effort, strive, (and even) sweat, were some of the words used in an article entitled, 'Yes Holiness does require effort', in a Christian news magazine I was reading the other day. Firstly, I acknowledge that sweat was needed to make holiness available to us. Note that I have used PAST tense. Here is the sweat that was required to enable you and I to be Holy; "And being in agony, He (Jesus) prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground". Lu 22v44. A link to another comment had the title, 'Sanctification is Sweaty Work'. It went on to say that, "whilst God is actively making us holy we must also be working at it ourselves", and "we can be actively killing sin". Have you ever tried to do those things? Waking up in the morning and deciding that today I am going to work at making myself holy!! today I am going to do some sin killing in me!! Where do you start? how do you know if you have succeeded?

That sort of advice is meaningless when it comes to real world practise. And I might add not found in the New Testament. Also, if that advice is correct, the person who had put out more effort, had strived the most against sin, could congratulate themselves on being a better Christian. In contrast the New Testament says, "By grace are you saved through faith and not by works lest any man should boast".(Eph 2:8,9) The words 'effort' and 'strive' are used by the New Testament writers. How do we explain that? Jesus replied to the man who asked what it was he needed to do to obtain eternal life. "This is the **work**

that God requires of you, that you believe in the one He has sent. (John 6:29) Peter, in his second letter instructs Christians to make every **effort** to develop their Godly character. What does that effort involve? He says, "Through God's great and precious promises you may be partakers of the Divine nature". By the effort of believing the promises. The Amplified Bible says, "Make every effort in exercising your faith to develop Godly character". Paul talks of the importance of striving in the book of Hebrews 4:1-11. He gives us the paradoxical statement, "Therefore let us **strive** to enter that (Gods) rest. The chapter speaks of God's works for us being finished from the foundation of the world – that we have ceased from our own works. The striving is explained again as faith or believing. "Let us fear lest we have unbelief". We are to strive to enter the rest of believing God has done all that needed to be done. Our part is to have faith in the promises.

Though it need not be so, for many Christians holiness is as big a mystery as any Sherlock Holmes ever tried to unravel. Really it is just a matter of knowing where to look in our book - the Bible. Here are the main points of a prophecy given to Isaiah of a holy highway created exclusively for Christians. You might like to read it in Isaiah 35:8-13. "It is for the redeemed and they shall walk upon it – the unclean shall not pass over it – no lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there – the simple ones and fools, shall not err in it and lose their way – the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing – they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away". Walking in or on a way, is mentioned in other parts of the Bible and means, as it does here, a manner of life and actively living that life.

Important in these verses is the realization we, the redeemed,

had no part in the construction of the highway. Our part is to say thank you and begin walking. The work needed to make this high holy life available to us was done by Jesus when he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Heb 9:26) and when it was done he said, "It is finished". (John 19:30) The holy highway is the gift, from God the Father, of life lived from a pure heart.

The worlds most elevated roadway, at 4,700 meters, is the Karakoram highway in Pakistan. Gods holy highway is infinitely higher because it is beyond the reach of everything unclean in the world, and demons and evil spirits, aptly called lions and ravenous beasts. God seems to want to highlight evils inability to come up on the highway by repeating; "they shall not be found there". Praise God, the holy highway has no entrance examination. No intellectual standard to be met. Those words, "the simple ones and fools, shall not err in it and lose their way" are remarkable if you stop and think about them. We have missed the import of those words. God is letting us know in no uncertain terms that holiness is not difficult. If simple ones and fools can succeed at holy living – anyone can!! Finally, the passage is emphatic - singing, joy and gladness are the overflow of life on the highway - with sorrow and sighing fleeing away. I believe you will experience the very same as you get understanding from this book.

I often think of Billy Bray a miner and drunkard saved during the Cornish revivals of the mid 1800's. I don't know how much of a simple man he was, but I remember reading how he would visit people and roll around on the floor with joy. He would tell people, "Father told me this and Father showed me such and such", and sometimes he would say how Father had reprimanded him. Reading about him early in my Christian life

taught me Gods response to people is a lot different to the attitudes we are accustomed to in secular society.

Simple ones and fools are not words you expect to see in a passage like this. Is God red flagging a principle for us here? I think so, and it is two sided. First, human prowess or intelligence does not accomplish successful holy living, and second, the life of holiness is... dare I say it? **Easy!**

Holiness is purity of heart. A close look at the New Testament reveals the first Christians accepted purity of heart as a part of Christs' salvation. They took it for granted when anyone received Jesus as saviour and accepted the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the result would be purity of heart. They believed when the word said Jesus was the lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world - that he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (John + Hebrews) that is exactly what happened. For them sin was no longer an issue for the genuine believer. They believed when Jesus said, 'it is finished' God had done a complete work and it was their responsibility to believe that in all of its' fullness.

Astonishingly we have lost that truth in this modern era. Many Christians do not experience the fullness of Christs salvation from sin. Confession of still being a sinner saved by grace is common. Thinking this is humility when really it ignores parts of God's word. A common teaching is that we should be daily confessing our sins to stay in fellowship with God. There is a large preoccupation with so called sin and very little preoccupation with Christs deliverance from sin.

Another idea that seems to be wide spread is that the Holy Spirit spends all His time convicting Christians of their sins so they can confess them, for change and to become more like

Christ. The only convicting the Holy Spirit does, according to the New Testament, is to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment to come, so that the world may turn and save themselves through Christ. Jesus said the Holy Spirit convicts "The world of sin because they believe not on me". (John 16:9) The New Testament also says, "For as He is (Jesus) so are we in this world. (1John 4:17)) No progressive Christ likeness there just a statement of completeness. We have accepted teachings and opinions not found in the word of God and have not used our own Bible reading to check on the truth. Admittedly it is not easy to differ with the beliefs of your entire denomination - but what choice do we have when faced with, as we will see, an unmistakable revelation clearly stated by God.

Regarding purity of heart, we read in Acts 10 God sent the apostle Peter to preach the Gospel to a Roman Centurion and his household. While Peter is speaking the Holy Spirit falls on the whole company of listeners and they speak in tongues and magnify God. Later in Acts 11 and 15 Peter is called to explain what happened. Both times he tells how the Holy Spirit fell on these Gentile people. The second time, before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, Peter goes a little further in his explanation: Peter rose up and said to them, "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe. So, God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Acts 15:7-9

We have missed the importance of what Peter is saying here. He says the experience of these new converts is the same as he and all the apostles and elders had when the Holy Spirit was

given to them in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. At that time on the day of Pentecost they received the same experience as these Gentiles – purity of heart. Have you ever heard that taught or preached? Probably not - it is a fact about the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit that has been overlooked. Their acceptance of what Peter is saying without comment, tells us the gathered Elders were hearing what was commonly believed among them – when the Holy Spirit was given, along with power, came a pure heart. They accepted that purity of heart was a basic experience the Gospel produced in those who believe it. Today we would describe the new converts experience as; they were born again, they received the fullness of the Spirit, they spoke in tongues and praised God. There would be no mention of purity of heart because we have lost that teaching. In many years as a Christian I have never heard purity of heart mentioned in relation to the Holy Spirit being given. I warrant your experience is the same. In fact, because it is the only result of the Spirit given mentioned by Peter here, shows it was of first importance in their thinking.

For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:10)

It helps to remember you could do nothing to earn your salvation. Christ Jesus had suffered and died and risen on your behalf - you had only to genuinely receive it. In that atonement He also enabled you to be holy and without blame before Him in love (Ephes1:4) as a gift requiring only genuine repentance. The ancient Greek myth of the man condemned to continually push a heavy boulder up a hill only to have it roll to the bottom again when he reached the summit, seems to fit any ideas of activity on our part to gain holiness.

In his book, 'Mystical Union', John Crowder says, "If this (holiness) is something that comes progressively or is something you can accomplish, please tell me how far along the holiness scale are you? Are you forty percent pure? Eighty percent pure? How about ninety eight percent pure"? He adds, "You are not becoming holy. That is an incongruous concept. You are adding an unnecessary and confusing element to the finished work of the cross. Does happy effortless Christianity sound scandalous to you? Does a daily walk of joyful, sinless existence seem like an impossibility? If the answer is 'yes' then allow me to introduce you to the Gospel. At least the Gospel as you may have never heard it before. The original version is so easy and pleasurable that it's offensive. There is a reason that the Gospel was first called good news. It is a glorious happy message of effortless union with God. It comes as utter shock and outrage to the depressive human willpower that is common to religion.... (later he says) Allow your mind to be changed. May you comprehend the unforced rhythms of grace". Unquote

If you have questions arising from no previous teaching about heart purity, receive it by faith first. Then talk the questions over with God and He will give you the answers. Jesus addressed the topic of the heart several times in his discourses. His first mention underscores the importance of our subject; "Happy are those whose hearts are pure, for they shall see God". (Math 5:8) Jesus' inclusion of the topic in His sermon on the mount signals a pure heart as a vital experience for our blessing and happiness.

Using trees as a metaphor for people's lives and hearts, the Lord knocks some of our accepted teachings out of the park. Throughout the Bible God reveals His dislike for half commitment or double mindedness. In Revelation 4 he

expresses his wish that his listeners were either hot or cold in their work for him. Being lukewarm they are in danger of being spewed out of his mouth. His preference in trees is the same: "Either make the tree good and its fruit good or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things". (Math 12:33,35) Notice the Lord allows of only two types of tree and heart; good or bad. He reinforces that in another section by adding, "a good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit". (Math 7:18) Which does not bode well for believing we have two natures - sin nature and Gods nature - nor the idea we sin continuously and must confess our sins daily to stay in fellowship with God? To accept those teachings is to say Jesus did not get the job done in his atonement.

Here is a practical example of the blessing of a pure heart from our everyday experience. I suspect many Christian men read the few lines in Mathew five, where Jesus talks about men looking at women, with a sense of guilt and burden. I have seen it interpreted as, "if a man looks at a woman he commits adultery". What the Lord said was, "But now I tell you: anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her, or to lust after her, is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart". (Math 5:28) The real issue Christ is talking about is the heart. He is applying some pressure, you might say, with the intent of making his listeners feel the need of the change of heart that only he can supply. The Lord himself said adultery is a product of an unclean heart. (Mark 7:21) Blessed are the men who look at a woman from a pure heart, adultery is no longer an issue.

Jesus' formidable description of the condition of the ungodly

human heart is sobering. The Amplified Bible uses seventy words to get the full meaning of the original language. (Mark 7: 20-23) The good news is, His blood applied can make a change instantly. Peters preaching to the Gentiles, mentioned previously, is an instance of that immediate change. Acts ten tells how God instructs Peter to visit a Roman Centurions house to preach the Gospel. An angel has told the man to ask Peter to come, and he and his household are gathered to hear what Peter has to say. Peter manages only half a sermon before the Holy Spirit falls upon all the listeners and they speak out in praise to God and speak in tongues. At the same time, as we already know, their hearts are purified.

Here was a large group of people with hearts in the unclean condition Jesus described. Peter arrives and preaches the Gospel, and in an instant a heart change happens as God gives them the Holy Spirit. Miraculous is the best description. In a split second they are transformed into people who are new inside. "Only the power that makes a world can make a Christian". (Wesley's Notes)

The human heart is a major Bible topic, but it does not really go into detail as to what the heart is. Most translators explain it as the central part of a person from which the will, mind, soul, and body get their motivation. I wondered about that for a while until I realized it is the experience that matters most. The Centurion and the people gathered with him quite probably new nothing of the Scriptures - had not heard of the Holy Spirit and may have had various ideas about whether God existed at all. After a small amount of Gospel preaching God gave them all the experience of a pure heart. Knowledge would have come later through the teaching of the apostles. They may not have had knowledge but I am sure you would have tried in vain to talk

them out of the marvellous experience God had given them.

Paul calls the experience; "Circumcision of the heart in the Spirit" (Romans 2:29) Which is a reminder none of us can get away from spiritual influence in our lives. Spiritual evil impacts the ungodly heart. The Christian pure heart is impacted by union with holy God.

In one of their adventures fictional detective Sherlock Holmes gives this advice to his compatriot Dr Watson, "It is an error to argue in front of your data, you can find yourself insensibly twisting them around to suit your theories". Holmes' modus operandi was to always approach each mystery from a blank slate and to subordinate emotion and theory to discovered facts. Purity of heart is a heart free from sin. If we examine the data given to us in the New Testament, it is not possible to come to any other conclusion.

What was Jesus' main mission; his primary purpose in coming from heaven to this world? Can it be said in a few words? It can, and John the Baptist has done it for us, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". (John 1:29) The words 'takes away' can also be translated 'to bear up' and 'to remove'. Jesus' main mission? To remove the sins of the world. "The Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all". (Is 53:6) Those words are a reminder of the personal aspect of salvation. In a large sports arena at a popular event the crowd might number ninety thousand. Each of those individuals had to pass one at a time through the entry gates showing their ticket to gain entry to the event. Though Christ died for the sins of the world, each of us must make the choice to receive Jesus as our personal saviour to enter the blessings of freedom from sin.

We could paraphrase Jesus' main mission this way, 'Christ died

for a world full of sinners'. When John says, "Christ died for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the entire world". (1 John 2:2) He meant, for every person in the world. To remove the sins of the world Jesus had to do something for the sinners. There would be no point in God forgiving sin and guilt if the sinners remained who had by nature, no choice but to keep on sinning. The sinners needed to be changed. We could say; the sinners needed to be removed. And that is what salvation is all about. In his suffering, death, burial, and resurrection Jesus made it possible for every sinner to be removed from the world.

John Wesley describes the remedy; "He made him a sin offering who knew no sin – a commendation peculiar to Christ. For us – who knew no righteousness, who were inwardly and outwardly nothing but sin; who must have been consumed by the divine justice, had not this atonement been made for our sins. That we might be made the righteousness of God through him – might through him be invested with that righteousness, first imputed to us, then implanted in us, which is in every sense the righteousness of God". (Wesley's notes)

Wesley is here commenting on 2 Corinthians 5:21. "For he hath made him to become sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might become the righteousness of God in him". That is how sinners are removed from the world; they believe the Gospel and are made the righteousness of God in Christ. Note the two words became and become. Both describe in this instance the entirety of being. Christ became sin that we might become in the entirety of our being, the righteousness of God in Christ. The sinner has been eliminated. Here is the central truth of salvation. It is said in various ways throughout the New Testament; A new creation, holy, pure of heart, without blame, children of God, Kings and Priests unto God, Saints, the

beloved.

This wonderful salvation is available to every person upon the face of the earth. If you are still wondering about the removal of sinners we can get confirmation from Paul. "For the love of Christ controls us and urges us, because we are of the conviction that if one died for all, then have all died". (2Cor5:14) He means, because Jesus died for every sinner in the world, they have already died – in Christ. They need only choose to accept his salvation to change from sinner to righteous child of God. Paul is saying this marvellous truth is his motivation to preach the Gospel wherever he travels.

Isn't a successful Christian life, which includes holiness, supposed to be attainable by anybody regardless of education, IQ, or social standing? The answer to that question is yes. And because the answer is yes, then holiness must be a whole lot easier than most of us think it is! The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said that a successful Christian life should be easy!!! "Come to me all ye who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. for my yoke is easy and my burden is light". (Math 11:28-30) Jesus used easy to describe His perfect holy relationship with His Father. He said that if we will learn from Him, our relationship with God will be easy and free from heavy burdens.

I have endeavoured to explain what the New Testament reveals about holiness. It only remains for you to receive the blessing by faith. Peter says in Acts 15 – "Their hearts were purified by faith".

William Seymour was the man used by God to bring about the famous Azusa St Revival that so mightily affected the world.

Here is a part of one of his Azusa St sermons. "There is Jesus the lamb without blemish, on the altar. Jesus takes that soul that now has eternal life in it and presents it to God for thorough purging and cleansing from all original and Adamic sin. And Jesus the Son of God, cleanses him from all sin, and he is made every whit whole, sanctified and holy".

(John Crowders books can be obtained from www.thenewmystics.com)